

WASHINGTON - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today following the release of a new report prepared by Families USA designed to provide a comprehensive picture of how many Americans were directly affected by the lack of health insurance coverage. Families USA is a non-profit, non-partisan organization focused on providing high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans.

"In September of last year, the Census Bureau reported that nearly 44 million Americans, including more than 1 million Marylanders, were without any form of health insurance in 2002. In its Current Population Survey, during the same year, the Bureau reported the largest increase in the number of uninsured people in the past decade - an increase of 14.6 percent, or 2.4 million people, over 2001.

"The Families USA report released this month reveals that upon closer examination of the numbers, the picture is even more bleak. If Americans who are uninsured for all or part of 2002 and 2003 are included in the estimate, approximately 81.8 million Americans - one out of three - under the age of 65 were without health insurance. And, of these 81.8 million uninsured individuals, 65.3 percent were uninsured for six months or more. Any gap in health care coverage makes Americans more vulnerable and medical care more costly.

"In Maryland, more than one out of four people under that age of 65 went without health insurance for all or part of the two-year period from 2002-2003. Of the 1.4 million uninsured Marylanders, nearly two-thirds went without health insurance coverage for six months or longer during this period.

"The trends we see dramatically depict a growing concern of working families that even if they have access to insurance today, they may lose it or soon be unable to afford it. The significant drop in coverage is largely attributed to spiraling health care costs, which have forced employers to drop health insurance coverage for their workers or to increase the employees' portion of the cost to the point that some workers are unable to pay. In our state, 81.8 percent of the uninsured population are members of working families.

"Our nation has the most sophisticated medical resources in the world and has made advances in some of the most complicated illnesses, yet ensuring that our people have access to the most basic health insurance not only eludes our nation's leaders, it is an epidemic that is growing and now inflicting working families and the middle class.

"It is time for us to stop reporting that American's are losing their ability to maintain good health; it is time to develop a meaningful solution to expand health insurance coverage for all Americans."

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